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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 KAMPALA 000431

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SUBJECT: UGANDA/DRC: CAPTURED LRA OFFICER TELLS HIS  
STORY

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¶1. Summary: The following is the account of Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) Colonel Thomas Kwoyelo, who was injured and captured by the Ugandan Peoples Defense Forces (UPDF) on February 3 during a firefight. Kwoyelo had been a senior officer until LRA leader Joseph Kony decided to execute LRA deputy leader, Vincent Otti, and arrest other LRA members who supported the peace process in October 2007. Though Kwoyelo's account does not offer much new information, he confirms that the UPDF-led regional military action called Operation Lightning Thunder (now called Rudia II) has disrupted the LRA's communications and command and control because of fears on the part of Kony of using satellite telephones. Kwoyelo detailed Sudanese training and equipment received prior to the signing the Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) in January 2005. Kwoyelo also said that Kony is not interested in making a peace deal. Finally, Kwoyelo's story corroborates other accounts of humane treatment of captured and rescued escapees by the UPDF. End Summary.

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BACKGROUND  
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¶2. Els De Temmerman, an internationally recognized journalist interviewed captured LRA Colonel Thomas Kwoyelo. The following is the majority of the New Vision interview of Kwoyelo, the former commander of the Sinia Brigade of the LRA that ran on April 26 entitled "I May Have Been Shot By My Own Brother". Begin text: "Colonel" Thomas Kwoyelo, the former commander of the Sinia Brigade of the Lord's Resistance Army, was injured and captured on February 3 by the joint forces of Uganda, Congo and Southern Sudan. He talked to Els De Temmerman.

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SUDANESE SUPPORT  
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¶3. Q: When did you first go to Sudan?

A: I went there in 1997. But other groups had gone earlier. There was a brief cease-fire in 1993 when the first peace talks took place in Cwero Sub-county. That

is when a group, led by Second-in-Command Komakech, started going to Sudan. Komakech later died in a Khartoum hospital.

14. Q: What kind of support did you get from the Government of Khartoum?

A: We received three trucks of food every month. Later it was reduced to two trucks. As for weapons and ammunition, but the time I arrived, there were already a lot of supplies. The Khartoum government trained us on how to use the big guns. We were taught how to use SPG9 and B10 bombs. The training took place in an open space in Juba. We also received a SAM7 anti-aircraft gun and 12.7mm guns. As for ammunition, they would bring us one or two trucks of cartridges and bullets on a regular basis. Contacts with the Khartoum Government passed through the LRA ambassador, called Lt. Col. Kayeng, who was based in Juba.

15. Q: Up to when did you receive supplies from Khartoum?

A: When Southern Sudan got autonomy (in January 2005), the supply line was cut off.

16. Q: There are reports that units went to collect arms from the Central African Republic and that there were airdrops in Congo.

A: I cannot confirm those reports. At least I did not witness any of that.

17. Q: How do you explain the new uniforms and arms

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Kony displayed during the peace talks?

A: I was still held up in southern Sudan when the talks started. I found the new uniforms and guns upon arrival in Garamba. When I asked where they came from, I was told they had been seized during a clash with the UN forces.

18. Q: Many people wonder how Kony was able to sustain his rebellion for all this time. Apart from Khartoum, where else did he get support from?

A: When the rift between Kony and (his deputy, Vincent) Otti occurred and Otti was killed, Kony ordered his troops to go back to Sudan and unearth ammunition we had buried there. Although part of it had been removed by the Ugandan Peoples Defense Forces (UPDF), some was brought back to the camp. Kony also received money and phones from delegations who visited him in Garamba. Some of the money was used to buy tents, gumboots, soap and other things.

19. Q: Did you hear the name Olara Otunnu (former UN Deputy Secretary-General) mentioned in the LRA?

A: I heard that name around 1996, when our relations with the Khartoum Government were still intact and Otti Lagony was still alive. I was told he came and met Kony. We were living in homesteads in southern Sudan at the time. But I don't know who he was or why he came.

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KONY EXECUTES DEPUTY, ARRESTS KWOYELO  
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110. Q: Did you witness the execution of Vincent Otti?

A: I did not see it because I was arrested just before Otti's arrest. But I heard the gunshots. Otti was killed together with Ben Accelam and Otim Record. All

of us were accused of being in favor of the peace talks and wanting to surrender to the Government of Uganda. Kony believed the talks were a way to get him out and have him arrested. He considered all those who were for peace talks as enemies.

¶11. Q: What exactly happened to you?

A: I was disarmed, blindfolded and tied for one week. All my escorts were disarmed, tied and put in different camps. Later, they were distributed to different units. I spent about one year in detention in First Brigade in Garamba and was then kept as a prisoner in Kony's Central Brigade. Up to the day I got shot, on February 3, 2009, I was under arrest.

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OPERATION LIGHTNING THUNDER  
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¶12. Q: What did you do on December 14, 2008, when your camp was attacked by the joint forces of Congo, Uganda and Southern Sudan?

A: I was taken along with Kony's group. They would give me a gun before we started marching and take it away from me every evening. We had been prepared for the joint offensive. A day earlier, Kony called all his officers and addressed them. "Everybody should know that there will be war," he told us. The Congolese, Ugandan and Southern Sudanese forces would jointly attack. He also said the war would be from the air.

¶13. Q: How did Kony know?

A: He told us God had spoken to him. He insisted he had received a vision of what was going to happen. When one of the commanders asked whether we should not leave the camp, he said "God had told him we would be punished if we vacated the camp." "Everybody should stay," he

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said. "The planes will come and bomb but nobody will die." The next morning, at around 9:00 a.m., four gunships came. They bombed until around midday. In all those bombings, I never saw a dead body.

¶14. Q: How did you survive that attack?

A: Kony mobilized everybody and we moved northwards in a big group. After two days, he addressed us in the wilderness. He ordered us to abduct as many as possible since the Congolese and Sudanese had agreed to fight him together with Uganda. "If even Jesus abducted his disciples, why not me?" he said. He then mixed all the units, separated them into small groups of 5, 10 up to 25 and sent them in all directions. Kony, together with his wives and about 50 escorts, set off following the trail we had come from. I have not seen him since.

¶15. Q: When did you last see Kony's deputy, Okot Odhiambo?

A: I last saw him the day Vincent Otti was killed, on October 2, 2007. I don't know where he is.

¶16. Q: How did Operation Lightning Thunder affect the LRA?

A: All military assemblies were suspended. There were no more fixed camps. Every small group was mobile all the time. The communication among the groups was also disrupted. Kony no longer used Thuraya satellite phones. If he did, he said, he would be shot within seconds by a MIG jet fighter. He is only using radio calls these days but very irregularly. He could switch

off for three weeks. As a result, the control and command structures were disorganized. It had become difficult for Kony to give orders.

¶17. Q: Why did the commanders of those small units not seize this opportunity to escape?

A: They fear the International Criminal Court (ICC). Kony told us every LRA commander was on the ICC list. Reports that only three commanders were indicted were propaganda, he said. "If you leave, the ICC will be waiting for you," he kept telling us. We believed him. Kony is very convincing. Only now that I am out do I realize that the reality is very different.

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KWOYELO CAPTURED  
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¶18. Q: How did you come out?

A: I was in a smaller unit belonging to Central Brigade. We were only 20 members, including four women. The brigade commander had told us we were going to meet Kony's head of security. We slept in the bush near Duru (a Congolese village) the night before. When we started walking the next morning, we ran into the combined forces. I was the second in line. The first, a young boy was shot dead. As I tried to run away, I got a bullet in the back which came out through my belly. Two boys tried to carry me but they could not cross the river. They removed my gun and left me behind. I felt like my soul had left my body. I must have passed out. At around 11:00 a.m. I heard voices, followed by three gunshots. A group of UPDF soldiers was following the trail of blood. I waited until one of them was very close. Then I called out to him. He ran away and returned with the rest of his unit. They surrounded me. One soldier who spoke Acholi asked my name. I said I was Kwoyelo. He then asked where I was from. They ordered me to come forward with my hands up. I crawled towards them, trying to raise my hands.

When they saw the blood oozing from my wound, they said: "Wait, we shall come for you." They asked where my gun was and I told them it had been taken away. They spread

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an army fatigue on the ground and carried me onto it. At that moment, I saw my older cousin-brother, Aranja, who is a soldier in UPDF. He had not recognized me since I had been abducted when I was very young. I told him the names of his father and sister and we hugged. It was a very emotional moment. They took me to their camp, put me on a drip and gave me porridge and tea. All along, I have been treated well by the UPDF.

¶19. Q: Reports say you were in charge of the killing of 10 students of Jimmy Ssekasi hotel school in 2001.

A: This is not true. Accelam Smart, who was then a major, was the commander of the operation. Some LRA members had gone to loot food in Koch Sub-county. The civilians had captured them and killed one of them. Smart then ordered massive killings of civilians. I was in Palaro when it happened.

¶20. Q: How do you feel about the atrocities committed by the LRA?

A: I feel bad. My own uncle and his three children were killed by the LRA. My situation in the bush was like that of a dog and his master. When you tell a dog to do something, it will act as instructed. All orders came from Kony. He was the chairman. He ordered attacks, abductions, ambushes. It was upon the

individual commander to show restraint or exaggerate. When you were ordered to ambush a vehicle and return with money and goods, it was up to the commander to kill all the passengers or to keep some alive. But it was impossible to question any of Kony's orders. He would believe you were against him and kill you.

121. Q: What do you want to do now?

A: I want to join the UPDF.

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COMMENT  
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122. Kwoyelo's fate remains uncertain. Our political contacts tell us that he will receive amnesty, but some military officers say they want Kwoyelo tried because he was fighting when he was captured. Kwoyelo's humane treatment confirms other accounts of the UPDF's respect for human rights during the operation.  
HOOVER